

Day By Day Description of Historic Meeting

Visiting Circus Competed With Conference In Attracting Public Attention at this Time.

The following account of the memorable Charlottetown Conference, 1864, is from "The Maritimes And Canada Before Confederation," by Professor William Menzies Whitelaw:

Before the deputation of Canadian executive councillors left Quebec they held several important sessions to discuss, and come to an agreement upon, the sort of union they would advocate at the Charlottetown Conference. The deputation consisted only of executive councillors and they therefore spoke with a united voice. In striking contrast was the situation in the Maritime Provinces. Not only was there no previous understanding among these Provinces, but in each case the delegation was made up of representatives of both government and opposition. The lack of a coalition government to deal with this important matter in any of the Maritime Provinces was a distinct element of weakness in their position in contrast to Canada's united front.

The First Delegate

The first delegate from the Mainland Provinces to arrive at Charlottetown was R. B. Dickey, Reform leader in the Nova Scotia legislative council. Throughout the sessions of both this and the subsequent Quebec Conference he continued to play a lone hand.

The rest of the Nova Scotian delegation reached Charlottetown on the "Heather Bell" from B. U. S. Nova Scotia, on the afternoon of August 31.

They were not officially met on landing, but made their way as best they could to the "Pavilion."

The Prince Edward Island Government later justified itself in the seemingly discourteous neglect by claiming that the Nova Scotians had arrived unexpectedly early. Several opposition papers, however, charged the members of the Government with having been at the circus when the delegates arrived, and the charge was not effectively answered.

Circus the Counter-attraction. Just before midnight on the same day the New Brunswick delegation arrived on the "Prince of Wales" from Shediac. Most of them made their way to quarters in the "Mansion House."

The Canadians arrived at noon on September first on the Canadian government steamer "Queen Victoria." They were met only by the Provincial Secretary, W. H. Pope, who roared out to meet them "with all the dignity he could." As the only staunch advocate of Maritime Union it was perhaps fitting that he should meet this unofficial Canadian deputation to an official conference on Maritime Union.

The Canadians, or such of them as could be accommodated, were directed to the "Franklin." The others remained aboard their ship. Here too the Prince Edward Island Government explained their inability to find accommodations for all the Canadians as due to the fact that a larger number had come from Canada than had been expected. The truth seemed to be that the city was full of Islanders who had poured in from the country to see, not the Conference, but the Circus.

The Opening Day

The date of the Conference had been set for September first. The opening day, however, was taken up with formalities of proceeding. The Maritime delegates had no sooner convened and selected as chairman Col. J. H. Gray, Prime Minister of the Island, than a telegram was read announcing the imminent arrival of the Canadians. It was thereupon agreed that the discussion of the Maritime Union project should be postponed until after the Canadians had been given the opportunity to present their views on the larger union.

An official visit was paid to the Lieutenant Governor at his executive mansion on the outskirts of the town.

Thus ended the first day.

The Second Day

On the second day the Confer-

ence settled down to a regular routine of sessions held from ten until three.

The procedure was for the Canadians to present, in more or less formal addresses, special phases of the larger scheme of union.

At the close of each address a free and informal discussion took place, consisting for the most part of interrogation of the speaker by delegates from the Maritime Provinces.

As the Press was rigidly excluded from every session, only general outlines of the discussion became known, but this, along with the public addresses made both during and subsequent to the meeting at Charlottetown, gave a general idea as to both the nature and sequence of the views presented.

On this first day of Conference sessions the main speech was made by Cartier, leader of Lower Canadian Conservatism. His chief theme seemed to have been the general advantages to be expected from the larger union, which would include not only a great extent of territory but also the various elements necessary to the making of a mighty nation—population, agriculture, and commercial and maritime position. With Cartier's well-known insistence on the preservation of essential provincial rights for his people, he might well have been expected to disarm criticism by the Maritime Province delegates who feared the submergence of provincial autonomy by the creation of this superstate.

Cartier was followed in the afternoon by George Brown, as doughty a leader of Upper-Canadian Reform, and as insistent upon the preservation to local governments of provincial interests. Brown had long been known as the champion of the principle of representation by population, and both here and later he continued to be the spokesman of this principle as applied to representation in the projected Legislative Assembly of the General Government.

Brown's Contribution

Brown, however, balanced this principle of apportionment in the Lower House with the principle of sectional equality in the projected Upper House. The inference was that Upper and Lower Canada were each "sections," and that the Maritime Provinces was a third section. Had this point not been stressed at the beginning the Canadians could hardly have been able subsequently to deny the Maritime Provinces provincial, as opposed to sectional, equality of representation in the federal Upper House. Certain it is that this principle was within a few days publicly advocated by Brown himself. Indeed, on the purely constitutional side, this may well be regarded as Brown's distinctive contribution to the making of the new constitution.

"John A.'s" Day

Saturday was the day of John A. Macdonald, and the Conference remained in session all day. Whatever tendency there might have been in the speeches of Cartier and Brown to emphasize the need for local autonomy was balanced by the insistence of Macdonald on the need for a strong central government which should control and dominate all the parts in their essential common life.

Macdonald was already known as an advocate of a legislative union of all British North America. Indeed the very tardiness of Macdonald in his practical acceptance of the union movement may easily be condoned, if not actually explained, by the very magnitude and difficulty of his scheme. It was one that would inevitably have involved the erection of strong and efficient municipal governments, and although in the Canada considerable progress had been made in this direction, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that they were non-existent in the Maritime Provinces. It was natural that a great part of the Saturday session should have been occupied in catechizing of Macdonald by Maritime Province delegates.

Galt's Wizardry

There was still one vital subject that had as yet scarcely been touched upon in either speeches or

discussions—the problem of finance.

For this Alexander Galt the Canadian Minister of Finance had been held in reserve. On Monday he spoke. His speech was impressive. The delegates marvelled at his wizardry. In Canada people had become used to his mastery over figures in the service of politics. The Maritime Province delegates were hardly prepared. Even those who had heard Tilley were impressed with the discussion on the equitable distribution of provincial debts, and the nature and incidence of taxation under the proposed union, the presentation of the Canadian point of view was virtually complete.

There was a session on Tuesday, the sixth, at which several Canadians gave further elaboration to the Canadian point of view, and the project of a subsequent conference for the formal discussion of this larger union scheme was presented by the Canadian deputation.

That evening the weight of nation-building was sufficiently lifted from the shoulders of the delegates to permit of their participation in a ball at Government House just west of the town.

McGee, true to form, remained in Charlottetown and gave a lecture on Burns.

Sectional

On Wednesday, the seventh, the Maritime Province delegates met alone. They had been appointed for the exclusive purpose of considering a legislative union of the Maritime Provinces, and so far they had given the matter but the slightest consideration. That little, however, had been sufficient to convince a proportion of the delegation, including some of its leading members, that such a union would be not only difficult but impossible. After the discussion on the seventh there could be less doubt about the matter.

There remained, however, the question as to whether, supposing the larger Union to be effected, the Maritime Provinces should enter it separately or as a unit. It was obvious that in the former case their position in relation to Canada would be weakened. On the other hand, such a preliminary union would seriously weaken the Maritime argument for a larger representation in the Central Upper House than that of either Upper or Lower Canada.

P. E. Island's Demand

But neither speculative advantages nor speculative disadvantages were to be weighed against the practically unanimous demand of Prince Edward Island that its legislature be not abolished. No scheme appeared to be possible that would give to the Island a united Maritime legislature any determined voice. What the Islanders actually insisted upon was the location of the capital on the Island. (Tupper Papers, Canadian Archives).

Considering the inaccessibility of the Island from the mainland during the winter when the legislative sessions of the provinces were held, this insistence amounted to a refusal to unite with the mainland provinces.

W. H. Pope remained the only consistent advocate of this act of self-segregation; and, although he came of a great family on the Island, his connection with the proprietors was already weakening his position with the people. Even Pope, however, had in the earlier assembly debate indicated a preference for the larger union.

The Maritime delegates thereupon adjourned their Union conference to meet in Halifax on Saturday, the tenth.

Maritime Union

It has often been said, and it is the prevailing opinion, that the Conference at Charlottetown did nothing but listen to the Canadians discuss the Canadian project, and abandon their own. One Maritime delegate subsequently asserted that only one resolution of any sort, other than that to receive the Canadians and the later one to adjourn to Halifax, was even presented at Charlottetown, and that it was never put to the vote. (Public letter of E. Palmer, in Monitor, Dec. 1864).

On the other hand in Saunders' biography of Tupper published only a year after the latter's death, there appears the text of a resolution said to have been moved by Tupper himself, seconded by his colleague Dickey, and passed by the Conference. This resolution committed the Conference to the principle of Maritime Union without evocation or reservation.

Although Saunders may easily have misinterpreted an item in the Tupper papers, it is impossible to think of this resolution as a deliberate falsehood. But on no other occasion would it have been apropos. A likely clue is found in the long letter of Edward Palmer written less than four months after the conclusion of the Charlottetown Conference. In that letter he insisted that no resolution had passed the Conference; that one had been introduced, but that no question had been taken on it. It would explain most of the facts

A Great Anniversary

No single event in Canada's history was of such far-reaching importance as the historic conference at Charlottetown seventy-five years ago, at which was conceived the scheme of confederating all the Provinces into the Dominion of Canada. "Providence being their guide," they indeed "found it better than they knew."

There were few outward indications, when Confederation was consummated in 1867, of the great Dominion as we know it today. The country was circumscribed in population, area, in resource development and in commerce. Railway building was in its infancy, with a mere 2,200 miles in the Central Provinces. There was not a single mile of track north of the Great Lakes and a transcontinental line was more than twenty miles away. Water transportation was archaic. Good roads in the modern sense were unknown. Halifax and St. John, Quebec and Montreal, were towns rather than cities. Winnipeg was a settlement of a few hundred, lost in the immensities of the prairie. Regina was Pile O' Bones; Saskatoon was not even planned; Calgary and Edmonton had not started to outgrow the trading post stage; Vancouver, a mere five-year-old infant. The West was a No Man's Land, and a trip in pre-railway days across the plains was an adventure. The Rocky Mountains rose up as an almost unsurmountable barrier between east and west, and British Columbia was remote to the rest of Canada as if it were in another continent.

Such were the conditions when the Confederation Fathers met at Charlottetown in 1864. It required courage equal to their vision to proclaim, as they did at that time, the faith in a Dominion stretching from sea to sea, in a nation united under the British Crown containing within its domain all the elements of power, all the essentials of prosperity, all the factors requisite to a strong and verile citizenship.

How Confederation Came About

- 1808—First suggestion of a union of the British North American provinces.
- 1814—Chief Justice Newell of Quebec suggested such a union.
- 1839—Lord Durham suggested a more definite union in his report.
- 1854—Nova Scotia Legislature passed a resolution approving of a union of Confederation.
- 1856—Sir A.T. Galt advocated a confederation of all the provinces.
- 1857—Nova Scotia Government further suggested a union of Maritime Provinces.
- 1858—Cartier-Macdonald Government urged a union upon the Imperial authorities.
- 1861—Nova Scotia Legislature requested the Colonial Secretary open up communications with the other provinces to that effect.
- 1864—THE CHARLOTTETOWN CONFERENCE, originally intended as a conference of the Maritime Provinces to discuss a time Union, but which was attended by delegates from all the Maritime Provinces and developed into the conference at which the Dominion of Canada was conceived.
- 1864—Quebec conference held to discuss the larger ideas which basic resolutions were passed.
- 1866—Conference held in London, England, which framed the British North America Act and which received the assent of Parliament and the Queen on March 29, 1867.
- 1867—July 1. First proclamations issued naming this date as the founding of Confederation.

to regard this resolution mentioned by Palmer as the one introduced by Tupper.

While the Conference was in session in Charlottetown a visitor had arrived, a Mr. Levesey, representing the Intercolonial Contract Company of London, seeking to secure a contract for building the line between Truro and The Bend. Negotiations were there begun which were carried on after the conclusion of the Conference. The New Brunswick Government accepted the offer conditionally, on the acceptance by the Government of Nova Scotia. It seemed as if Tilley might be able to secure closer economic relations between the two provinces without the necessity of any political union.

Quebec Conference Planned

On Thursday the delegates made an excursion to the North Shore of the Island, returning for a ball and banquet at Charlottetown that evening. The following morning at four Canada's Confederation and the Maritime delegates left together on the "Queen Victoria" for Pictou. Some of the Canadians visited the coal mines and proceeded overland by carriage to Truro, and thence by rail to Halifax. The others remained on board ship and arrived at the Nova Scotia capital early Saturday afternoon, almost simultaneously with the overland party. At three the delegates were presented to the Lieutenant Governor; at four the Conference was reconvened, the Canadians again sitting in as visitors, and taking an active part in the plans for future discussion. After a brief session the Conference was adjourned till Monday at ten.

Between ten and eleven on Monday the Maritime delegates were closed by themselves discussing the bearings of the Maritime Union scheme on the larger plan presented by the Canadians. They did not come to

any conclusion, and the Conference was readmitted.

After a joint session of three hours a decision was reached in favor of the Conference proposal for the speedy convening of a formal conference on a larger federal proposal. This immediately took matters in telegraphed to Quebec where a proposed conference would be held there, telegraphed to foundland asking it to send representatives to the conference at Quebec. The date was set for October 10.

A Dull Luncheon Party

The luncheon party there to be a solemn and tedious nineteen-year-old Lady Elizabeth in later years to be Queen of both of England, glanced fully at the assembled guests.

Something must be done to liven the occasion. She decided to take matters in hand as she took a delicious sense of humor. She visited the coal mines and proceeded overland by carriage to Truro, and thence by rail to Halifax. The others remained on board ship and arrived at the Nova Scotia capital early Saturday afternoon, almost simultaneously with the overland party. At three the delegates were presented to the Lieutenant Governor; at four the Conference was reconvened, the Canadians again sitting in as visitors, and taking an active part in the plans for future discussion. After a brief session the Conference was adjourned till Monday at ten.

"Drawing a friend aside, she asked: "Can you laugh?" "Yes," was the astonished answer. "Will you laugh with me at luncheon whenever I raise a eyebrow?"

Still astonished, the friend asked she would do as she was asked, perhaps fearing her plan might be for want of rehearsal. Lady Elizabeth thought it necessary to both laugh there and do so. The result was a complete success. Gradually, solemnity was banished. The pompous guests soon infected by merriment and stated intervals throughout the meal. Lady Elizabeth's own laugh rang out, to be followed by another's laughter, equally able, if a little forced.